

Ben N Amer Indian

The Northern California Indian Association.

THE INDIAN POPULATION OF CALIFORNIA.

Based upon an address by Dr. C. Hart Merriam of the Biological Survey, Washington, D. C.

1834—Indians in California	- - -	210,000
1900—Indians in California	- - -	17,000
Decrease	- - -	193,000

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WHY?

The answer to the above is found in a recent address by Dr. C. Hart Merriam, of the Biological Survey, Washington, D. C. This well known student of our Indian race tells us, that after ten years of exhaustive investigation, he has reached the following conclusions:

"California, at the time of its discovery was more densely populated than any area of equal size in North America Not only was this the case, but the number of tribes and of distinct linguistic stocks within its boundaries nearly equalled those of all the rest of the continent north of Mexico."

While definite statistics exist for only a limited area, viz: the Mission Strip, we have a great quantity of corroborative evidence, which all points in the one direction.

We have, first, the abundant food supply throughout the State, and the benign climatic conditions, both of which tended to protect and prolong human life. "Doves, ground squirrels and rabbits, antelope, elk and quail abounded, while the rivers and sloughs swarmed with waterfowl, and teemed with mussels and fish. Wild oats covered the land, and acorns abounded." Along the Sierras, berry-bearing manzanitas and nut-bearing Digger-pine were added and the northern rivers ran with salmon and eels.

Another form of evidence is found throughout the State in the "hundreds of half obliterated sites of villages, which in the early days were thriving communities. There is every reason to believe that the average density of population excluding the deserts, and high boreal mountains, was at least as great as that of the Mission Strip."

For the population of this strip, we have the records of the Padres,

carefully kept from 1769-1834. These show the increase in numbers of baptized Indians, until in 1834, the year of the secularization of the Missions, the number was 30,000. "In the early years, the gentiles vastly outnumbered the neophytes, but at the close of the Mission period, it is practically certain that the neophytes largely outnumbered the gentiles." Dr. Merriam assumes a ratio of 1-4, thus giving at that date, a population of 40,000 for the Mission Strip.

The area included in the Mission Strip is 1-5 of the habitable area of the State, and as everything indicates an equally dense population throughout the State, we have a total of 200,000 Indians, to which may be added "the Modoc, Washoe, Piute and Shoshone of the region east of the Sierras, and the Mohave, Chemahueve and Yuma of the lower Colorado, whose members living within the State must have numbered collectively, at least 10,000." Thus we have a grand total of 210,000 at the close of the Mission period, 1834. "It may be urged that there is no evidence that the population was equally dense in different parts of the State at the same time. Admitting this, there is surely no evidence to the contrary, and the known facts point to a continuously contemporaneous population of large size throughout the non-desert parts up to the time each area in turn was smitten by the blight of foreign invasion. The wide spread bounty of the food supply, the freedom from intertribal wars, (except in the Northwest) and the probable absence of epidemic diseases until introduced by the whites, all point in this direction."

"The tremendous decrease that has taken place during the last century, a decrease amounting to the complete annihilation of scores of tribes and the reduction to scattered remnants of scores of others, is due wholly to the coming of the white man. It began in the early days of the Mission Padres and has continued to the present time."

"While in the main gradual, there were two periods, in which its ratio was suddenly and greatly accelerated. The first of these was the period immediately following the confiscation of the Missions, beginning in 1834. The second, the period immediately after the discovery of gold, beginning in 1848. The secularization of the Missions turned the helpless neophytes out into the world. So fatal was the move and so sudden its operation that in eight years, the neophytes had dwindled to one-seventh the number present in 1834, leaving only 4,450 at the Missions. A generation of bondage had unfitted them for self-support, and their old homes were occupied or overrun by Spanish-Mexican ranchers. Individual Indians migrated to other tribes; but if considerable numbers had done

so, evidence of it would be found in descendants of such Indians at the present day. Such are not found. Therefore it is conclusive that the great bulk of Mission Indians perished in their own territory." The shrinkage of the native population during the fifteen years from 1834-1849 is estimated by Dr. Merriam at 110,000, which is at the appalling rate of 7000 a year.

The discovery of gold in 1848 inaugurated the second period of destruction. During the single year of 1849, no fewer than 77,000 gold seekers arrived. "They were a heterogeneous assemblage, comprising many good and noble men, but also thousands of the rougher and more turbulent classes, not excepting criminals." A white man's life was not safe if it stood in the path of greed, how much less an Indian's. "Villages were broken up, and the inhabitants massacred or scattered, men and women debauched with whiskey, men were ruthlessly killed, women appropriated, and seeds of disease sown which undermined the constitution of succeeding generations." Resistance to white aggression was useless on the part of a peaceful race like our Indians, but if they had been Sioux or Apaches the story would have been different, and their descendants would not now be homeless wanderers in the land of their ancestors. "The two destroying armies, Spanish-Mexican ranchers, and American gold seekers, covered practically the whole of California, leaving only the deserts on the east, and these were not wholly exempt."

"Later, when mining gave place to agriculture, the tillers of the soil coveted the lands of the Indians and proceeded to take them, without fear of interference from either the owners or the law, for until the year 1872, in cases in which a white person was a party, the testimony of Indians—be it said to the shame of California—was not admitted in any court of justice. Down to recent times, therefore, a white man could confiscate the home of an Indian, and even kill the occupant without danger of punishment, and it may be added, that in spite of the change in the law, conditions today are not much better for the Indian."

"Evidence of all this cruelty is abundant. It relates not only to the steady decline of the native population throughout the State, but also to epidemics of smallpox and other diseases, to the demolition of sources of food supply, to the burning of stores of food laid up for winter, to the confiscation of homes, to cold-blooded massacres by both Spaniards and Americans, to raids for the alleged purpose of capturing horse thieves, but in most instances for the real purpose of capturing Indian children and young women for servants, and to the destruction of life attending

the capture and removal of Indians to Government Reservations." One instance of incredible outrage which took place in 1856 or '57 was related to Dr. Merriam by eye witnesses. "A gang of cattle and hog men took it upon themselves to drive the helpless Taches and other tribes from Tulare Lake and lower Kings River to the Fresno reservation. Men, women and children, including the sick and aged, were hurriedly driven through mud and water during the height of the rainy season, by brutal men on horseback; many fell out and perished by the way, and those who reached the hated destination and afterwards escaped, returned to find their food caches appropriated for the hogs, and on making their presence known, were themselves hunted down and quietly 'taken care of' by the whites."

"In September, 1850, Adam Johnson, sub agent in charge of the Valley Indians, wrote the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, that within the short period of occupancy by the whites, the red man had fast faded away; many had died of disease; others had fled to the mountains to enjoy for a brief period their primeval sports of hunting and fishing. Practically all the Coast Indians had gone; of the numerous tribes, which only a few years before inhabited the country bordering on the bay of San Francisco, scarcely an individual was left."

Dr. Merriam closes with these significant words:

"The principal cause of the appallingly great and rapid decrease in the Indians of California is not, in my judgment, the number directly slain by the whites, or the number directly killed by whiskey or disease, but a much more subtle and dreadful thing: it is the gradual but progressive and relentless confiscation of their lands and homes, in consequence of which they are forced to seek refuge in remote and barren localities, often far from water, usually with an impoverished supply of food, and not infrequently in places where the winter climate is too severe for their enfeebled constitutions. Victims of the aggressive selfishness of the whites, outcasts in the land of their fathers, outraged in their most sacred institutions, weakened in body, broken in spirit, and fully conscious of the hopelessness of their condition, must we wonder that the wail for the dead is often heard in their camps and that the survivors are passing swiftly away?"

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